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Shared Future – Shared Values? Taking Stock of the Peace Process in Northern Ireland: Teenagers' Perspectives

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Abstract

Although preceded by years of political and policy developments, the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (or Belfast Agreement) in 1998 is, generally, regarded as marking the end of conflict and the beginning of the transition to peace. However, this transition has been neither linear nor straightforward. Divisions, both physical and symbolic, reflecting collective identities and ‘otherness’ remain resistant to change and continue to foster sectarianism, mistrust and outbreaks of violence. Despite some positive change, not least of which is the absence of sustained violence, the majority of neighbourhoods and schools remain either Protestant or Catholic. Drawing on data from the Young Life and Times (YLT) survey, an annual attitudinal survey of 16-year olds in Northern Ireland that has been running since 2003, this article explores what young people’s perspectives reveal about the complexities and the challenges involved in transitioning to a more shared society. Where relevant and possible, their attitudes are compared with those expressed by adults in the annual Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey. A primary focus on tracking teenagers’ attitudes is important for a number of reasons. While often regarded as a ‘post conflict’ generation segregation and polarisation remain features of teenagers’ everyday lives and the political landscape. Children and young people are one of the four key strategic priorities in the latest government strategies to build united communities and achieve change and are embedded in the Programme for Government 2016–2021. If these government commitments are to be realised the voices of young people must become central rather than peripheral. It is important, therefore, that their opinions are not only sought, but interrogated and feed into policy.

Key words: Teenagers; good relations, belonging, identity, culture, Northern Ireland

Introduction

Since the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement (hereafter called the Agreement) in 1998, enhancing community cohesion and building a shared future have been central to numerous government strategies and policies in Northern Ireland (OFMDFM, 2005; 2010; 2013). While the underpinning policies, language and emphasis have evolved and changed the promotion of community/good relations, attained through greater sharing, reconciliation, understanding, regeneration and mutual respect are central (McVeigh, 2014). Undoubtedly these notions exert a powerful and appealing rationale; yet the fact that the progress of the peace process has been neither linear nor straightforward attests to the inherent difficulties in interpretation and implementation by political representative, communities and individuals. Given the complex and contested history of Northern Ireland this uneven progress is hardly surprising; while the divisions between communities are reflected in macro structural forces (religion, ethnicity, politics, class) they are also underpinned by everyday relationships and communal identities rooted in symbols, traditions, cultures and territory that both bond and divide (McKnight & Leonard, 2014).

Drawing on the Young Life and Times (YLT) survey, a long-running ARK (www.ark.ac.uk) attitudinal survey of 16-year olds in Northern Ireland, this article seeks to shed some light on these complex issues. Attitudinal change is explored in terms of a number of key survey questions on identity, belonging, culture and symbols, sharing and mixing, and past and future perceptions of community relations. We discuss what these complex and, at times, contradictory responses might tell us about the progress of the

ongoing peace process and the policies of community/good relations that accompany it, and how ethno-national identities and the political and culture values, symbols and dispositions attached to these while not immutable remain difficult to erode. While increased levels of immigration to Northern Ireland have created a more diverse society, with the benefits and challenges of this being reflected in both everyday life and government policy, this articles explores continuity and change through the narrower ‘two community’ lens.

Admittedly surveys are not without limitations, presenting only a ‘snapshot of public mood’ (Morrow, 2015), while being unable to capture the layers of meaning that can lie behind a particular response (Devine, 2014). However, as these ARK surveys contain not only a number of time-series questions on community/good relations but also a range of questions that have been asked regularly over the life of each survey, they can offer unique insights. Moreover, in response to political and social change new questions may be introduced where salient.

The article opens with a brief overview of the Northern Ireland conflict and draws attention to how understandings of collective identity and of difference are embedded in competing notions of tradition, culture and territory. Beginning with the Agreement, the discussion focuses on the development and vulnerabilities of strategies and policies implemented to embed the peace process and promote community/good relations. It then draws on relevant annual ARK survey data to explore attitudinal continuity and change and closes with a discussion of how future policy framework in relation to community/good relations may develop.

Overview of the conflict and peace process

Northern Ireland has a long and contested history of political and religious discord underpinned by structural inequalities and religious and ethno-national segregation in housing, employment, education and social activities (Coulter, 1999; Tonge, 2002). While from its inception, sporadic episodes of violence erupted between Catholic/nationalist and Protestant/unionist communities, the late 1960s saw the beginning of three decades of conflict on an unprecedented scale and intensity. During this period, commonly referred to as 'The Troubles', around 3,700 people were killed (McDowell, 2007), and, dependent on the definition applied, 40,000 to 100,000 were injured (Breen-Smyth, 2013), while tens of thousands of people were displaced due to intimidation and political violence (Mesev, Shirlow & Downs, 2009). In response to this violence and fear a range of, initially makeshift, structures and barricades were erected, most notably between working class Protestant and Catholic neighbourhoods in Belfast, to keep the two communities apart. Over the duration of 'The Troubles' many of these barriers became permanent and, despite the transition to a more peaceful society, a range of 'peace walls', particularly in Belfast, continue to divide many of these communities (McKnight & Leonard, 2014). This continued sense of territoriality, identity, belonging and 'othering' is reinforced through the flying of flags, Irish or British (sometimes Palestinian or Israeli), the painting of kerbstones to reflect allegiances to these flags, wall murals depicting iconic events or symbols and a range of festivals and parades (McKnight & Leonard, 2014; Rolston, 2003; Shirlow & Murtagh, 2006); while informal territorial boundaries, easily missed by the 'outsider', abound. The thirty years of 'The Troubles' solidified and extended already existent residential and social segregation, bolstered sectarianism and increased attachment to or abhorrence of particular neighbourhoods, cultural traditions and symbols. Thus, "while the state border is 'now almost invisible... [and] crossing is essentially an anonymous act" (Diez & Hayward, 2008, p. 53), an

observation that may be challenged as a result of the Brexit vote, “the same cannot be said of the myriad borders – physical, cultural and mental that remain features of everyday life for many people living in Northern Ireland” (McKnight & Leonard, 2014, p. 167).

While the conflict is often portrayed as being between Catholics/nationalists and Protestants/unionists, this fails to capture the complex interweaving of religion, contested territorial allegiances and competing identities, local and national, that continue to play out in Northern Ireland (Devine & Robinson, 2014; Hayes & McAlister, 2013). While not primarily about religion, in terms of religious practice, many people in Northern Ireland derive a sense of belonging and identity from the contested memories, traditions, symbols and rituals that are linked to religion and competing nationalisms (Mitchell, 2006; O’Dowd & McKnight, 2015). Identities are important as they “structure a range of political and social attitudes and values that impact on voting choices, housing and schooling and what counts as ‘culture’” (Devine & Robinson, 2014, p. 3). While neither binary nor immutable they may, particularly in a region such as Northern Ireland, be resistant to change.

While sustained violence has subsided and Belfast is now a popular tourist destination, competing nationalisms remain, arguments over parades, flags and territory endure, and “culture wars” continue to play out in public space (Wilson, 2016, p. 145) in both everyday encounters and periodic contentious events. It has long been recognised that, “Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (Williams, 1983, p.87). This assertion is particularly relevant in ethno-nationally divided societies such as Northern Ireland, where culture is used to contrast, justify or vilify identities and traditions. Notions of collective culture, identity and belonging are bound up in a range of emotional and intangible dimensions and attachments, that, if noticed at

all, to the outside eye may appear irrational or negative. However, these “emotional attachments to symbols, traditions, place and power create and sustain meaning even if to others their continued significance no longer exists” (McKnight & Leonard, 2014, p. 177).

One of the most overt and contested displays of culture is parades, and, while only a few lead to violence, their authenticity as communal ‘cultural’ celebrations is differently understood between and within communities. To some they represent a ‘way of life’ and a demonstration of their cultural tradition, while to others they are sectarian or triumphalist (Komarova & McKnight, 2013). More widely, in everyday encounters and the “micropolitics of everyday life” (Amin, 2002) the retention of murals and the flying of flags, which remain a feature of life, creates a ‘chill factor’ and restricts everyday access and movement, creating a sense of safety and belonging to some and alienation to others (Shirlow, 2003). Indeed, within the competing discourses of good relations, shared space, transformation, sectarianism, equality and diversity attempts to dismantle both physical and symbolic barriers can be seen as threats to traditions and identities and, as such, allegiances to these may become more entrenched. Furthermore, efforts to build good relations, both within and between communities, and create a sense of belonging and identity that all citizens can subscribe to and/or respect are undermined by residual paramilitary violence (Wilson, 2016).

Community Relations and Good Relations Policy

The Agreement recognised the political rights of both communities and established a range of political institutions, most notably an Assembly with a power-sharing Executive. However, as Todd (2015, p. 11) notes “while lengthy and detailed and giving each party most of their key aims it left many crucial elements thin ... which allowed for agreement,

but meant that implementation would be crisis-ridden”. Some would argue that the difficulties of creating transformative public policy are undermined by consociational frameworks put in place by the Agreement, as while the main political groupings continue to reflect sectarian divisions there is little encouragement for new allegiances or identities to emerge (Dixon, 2012; Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006; Wilford and Wilson, 2003). However, while acknowledging difficulties, others argue that critics place too much emphasis on the inflexibility of identities (Nagle, 2012), and suggest that consociational framework “can provide a future that is free of division if not difference” but that this demands ‘constructive political conduct’ (McGarry & O’Leary, 2006: 250).

After ongoing consultations, in 2005, under direct-rule, A Shared Future (ASF) policy document on good relations was produced. While having much to recommend it, the differing approaches to issues of, for example, equality, culture and identity held by the two major political parties – Sinn Féin (Catholic/nationalist) and the Democratic Unionist Party (Protestant/unionist) ensured it remained vague. As Komarova (2008, p. 19) succinctly notes, “... [it] dances around and hints at but it never quite articulates in detail the link between ‘identity’, ‘culture’, ‘celebrating differences’ and ‘good relations’ in a democratic society”. Its subsequent shelving in 2007 highlights the divisive nature of notions of sharing. A further consultation document *Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration* issued in 2010 was widely criticised. In May 2013 *Together: Building a United Community* (T:BUC) was published with change being mapped against four strategic priorities – children and young people, shared community, safe community, and cultural expression. Its vision is to build ‘*a united community based on equality of opportunity – the desirability of good relations and reconciliation – one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated*’ (T:BUC, 2013: 3). Underpinning this document is the notion that building a ‘united community’ starts at

local level, focuses on children and young people with key planks being the dismantling of interface barriers and the creation of shared school campuses and shared neighbourhoods (Hayward, Dowds & Shaw, 2014, p. 1). While there has been some limited progress in relation to the dismantling of ‘peace walls’, it has been argued that the attitudes of people living near ‘peace walls’ have hardened somewhat since 2012 (Byrne et al., 2015). In relation to shared campuses opinion remains divided some seeing any sharing as a positive step, with others feeling it dilutes earlier assurances of integration (Wilson, 2016).

As the preceding discussion highlights, the young people who are the primary focus of this article have grown up in a society marked by positive changes, not least of which is the reduction of sustained violence. However, concomitantly, much discursive and physical space continues to be occupied or claimed in terms of ‘them’ and ‘us’ and, directly and indirectly, this impacts on the lives and attitudes of young people, most particularly those living in socio-economic deprived areas. Despite the backdrop of ‘normality’ that has followed the Agreement, educational and residential segregation remain, sectarian geographies which curtail or dictate spatial practices and opportunities persist, and for some young people sporadic inter and intra community violence and threats from paramilitary groups are features of their everyday lives (Brown and Dwyer, 2014; McAlister, Haydon, Scraton, 2013; McKnight and Leonard, 2014). Moreover, as Browne and Dwyer (2014, p793) highlight, underlying structural and social problems of, for example, poverty, marginalisation, poor mental health and low educational attainment can mean that for some young people growing up in the “new” Northern Ireland remains both challenging and dangerous.’ Despite the move to a more peaceful society, the legacies of the past linger and embedded structural inequalities can, to varying degrees,

impact on how young people interact with and make sense of the society in which they live.

Empirical data

YLT is an annual postal survey undertaken in Northern Ireland since 2003. A random sample of 16-year olds is drawn from the Child Benefit register. Everyone with birthdays in February and March, and registered with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' (HMRC) Child Benefit Register is invited to take part. Thus the sample size varies slightly each year, and in 2016 1,009 16-year olds took part in the YLT survey.

Whilst YLT has surveyed 16-year olds on a range of issues that are relevant to their lives, questions on community relations have been included annually with a set of core questions being repeated each year, allowing us to monitor attitudes over time. Tracking young people's attitudes is important for two main reasons: Firstly, unlike many adults today's 16- year olds today have grown up in a society where, as Wilson (2016, p. 143) suggests, the "*politico-military conflict has morphed into a politico-cultural one*". Thus, attitudes and experiences of young people are good indicators of how the peace process has impacted on their sense of belonging and national and cultural identities. Secondly, children and young people are one of the four strategic priorities in the Programme for Government in Northern Ireland 2016 - 2021, and significant investment has been made and will be made by government to build united communities and achieve positive attitudinal change. It is important, therefore, that young people's opinions are sought, interrogated and fed into policy. Where appropriate we make comparisons with findings from the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey, an annual attitude survey among adults in Northern Ireland. NILT grew out of the Northern Ireland Social Attitude

(NISA) surveys which were first undertaken in 1989. Both NILT and YLT are now used as indicators in government good relations policies.

Perception of community relations over time

Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here

Figure 1 shows how the proportion of adults and young people, since 1989 and 2003 respectively, who think relations are better than 5 years ago has changed over time. When assessing the survey data improvements and deteriorations in perceptions are evident and these can be seen to coincide with the stability/instability in the power sharing institutions or particularly contentious disputes. For example, in 2001, after a build-up of local tensions, the Catholic Holy Cross Primary School situated in an interface area in Belfast was picketed by Protestant protestors and images of terrified school children made news not only in Northern Ireland but around the world. More recently in 2012, a decision by Belfast City Council to fly the Union Flag on government buildings on specific days rather than every day provoked severe disruption and violence, in which young people were often involved. Figure 2 shows the time series data of perceptions that adults and 16-year olds have had about the future of community relations. The lines in both figures are similar which would indicate that the anticipation of future relations is a good indicator for current relations.

As noted, the yearly changes in these two Figures may be affected by particular political events around the time of the fieldwork. However, continuously monitoring attitudes also reveals the progress made in a long-term political process, as substantial incidents and events lose their significance over time and general trends become more visible; this is where the Life and Times data is particularly strong.

Figures 1 and 2 show that amongst adults optimism about community relations has significantly increased over time. Whilst in 1989 only 22 percent of adults surveyed thought that community relations were better than they had been 5 years earlier, in 2015 the proportion who felt this had more than doubled (52%) . Although representing a decrease from the high point in 2007 (64%), the long-term trend is that adults are now much more optimistic about community relations than they were in the late 1980s. However, if a trendline was drawn from 1998 to 2015, this line would be almost perfectly horizontal. Unsurprisingly, attitudes to future relations were also most positive when the first ceasefire was declared and when the Agreement was signed with, as Figure 2 shows, hitting a low point in 2001 when the devolved institutions collapsed. Time series analysis shows a significant increase in optimism about future community relations since 1989; however, from 1998 (62%) to 2015 (46%) the trend is actually downwards.

Young people's attitudes

Plotting the attitudes of 16-year olds against those of the adults shows that in almost all years since 2003, young people's attitudes to community relations were more negative than those of adults. Figures 1 and 2 show that 16-year olds' perceptions were markedly less positive with regard to perceptions about future relations, and in some years (2005, 2006 and 2009), there was a 14 percentage point gap between them. However Figures 1 and 2 also show that in the last three years, attitudes have become more similar, and from 2012 to 2014 the level of optimism among adults and 16-year olds has been basically the same.

Figures 3 and 4 compare the attitudes to community relations among 16-year olds over time in relation to respondents' religious backgrounds. The figures evidence that when the time series started, 16-year olds from Protestant backgrounds were significantly less

likely than their Catholic counterparts to say that community relations are better than 5 years ago and will be better in 5 years' time. There is extensive academic discussion around a perceived sense of alienation and pessimism within Protestant communities as they adjust to the political and social transitions required by an Agreement whereby many feel they 'lost out'. The reasons underpinning these negative feelings are complex and disputed, and it is suggested that they may reflect a sense of loss of power in the political arena, a dilution of a sense of 'Britishness', a diminution of the freedom to express their culture and heritage, and a fracturing of Protestant communities due to both macro-economic changes and intra community disputes (Mac Ginty, & Du Toit, 2007; Patterson, 2012; Southern, 2007).

However, Figures 3 and 4 show that the views of Catholic and Protestant 16-year old have become more similar. In 2015 approximately four in ten 16-year olds said that community relations will be better in 5 years' time, which is only a very slight and statistically insignificant increase in respondents answering this way compared to 2003.

Insert Figures 3 and 4 about here

Perhaps the more significant change is that the proportion of 16-year olds who felt that community relations are worse now, or will be worse in 5 years' time has decreased since 2003 (Figure 5). In 2015 only about one in ten respondents (9%) thought that relations were worse than 5 years previously, and an even smaller proportion (6%) felt that relations would be worse in 5 years' time, compared to the 17 percent and 15 percent respectively who gave these responses in 2003. Again, Figure 5 clearly shows the impact of notable political events and incidents on the opinions and perceptions of young people, as the higher level of scepticism around the time of the flag protests in 2013 clearly demonstrates.

Insert Figure 5 about here

National and religious identities and a sense of belonging

The figures presented so far offer two insights. Firstly, attitudes to community relations among 16-year olds are positive, but not as positive as perhaps might be expected from a 'post-conflict' generation. However, it would be naïve to assume that these young people can 'automatically jettison the contested memories, histories, cultures, practices and processes that fuelled/fuels violence' (McKnight and Leonard, 2014: 176). Attitudinal change requires more than the reduction of sustained violence, and, as noted above, many divisions and suspicions remain or have taken on a new complexion in the period since the signing of the Agreement (Brown and Dwyer, 2014). For some young people the dividends of peace are limited as they continue to live in politically divided, economically and socially deprived and physically depressed communities. Moreover, perhaps unsurprisingly, adults who had experienced years of violence may, in comparative terms, judge change more favourably and are, thus, more positive in their assessments. Nonetheless, what is also evident is a process of slow convergence both between adults' and young people's views and also between Catholic and Protestants.

At this point, we turn our attention to national and religious identity. A strong relationship between the two can be seen as a proxy measure for the strength of identification with the Nationalist/Catholic or Protestant/Unionist communities. The YLT and NILT time series data shows that there has been little substantial change in how Catholics and Protestants see themselves in terms of their national identities. The vast majority of Catholics retain an Irish national identity whilst over two thirds of adult Protestants feel British. A growth in the proportion of adults and young people adopting 'Northern Irish' as a national identity could be interpreted as an indicator that people are increasingly content with the constitutional settlement and accept Northern Irishness as a national identity in its own

right; however, especially amongst adults, there is little evidence of this happening. In 2003, one quarter of both adults (24%) and 16-year olds (25%) identified as Northern Irish. In 2015, this was virtually the same for adults (26%), whereas the proportion of 16-year olds identifying as Northern Irish had increased over time to 37 percent. However, this increase was predominantly due to the fact that in 2003 only one third (33%) of 16-year old Protestants identified as Northern Irish whereas in 2015 half (50%) did. During the same period there was only a five-percentage point increase among 16-year old Catholics who identified as Northern Irish (16% and 21% respectively). Thus, a Northern Irish identity remains a more acceptable term for Protestants than Catholics, which may reflect the origins of Northern Ireland. While, as NILT data shows, Catholics may not desire a united Ireland they find it easier to identify with Irishness, indicative, perhaps, of the range of emotional, ephemeral attachments to ideas of nationhood as opposed to territory. The demographic shift, but also the greater equality that young Catholics in Northern Ireland experience compared to their parents and grandparents generation may, however, result in a greater sense of belonging to Northern Ireland.

Table 1 however shows that there is still a significant difference between Catholics and Protestants in relation to their sense of belonging to Northern Ireland. For both adults and young people the sense of belonging to Northern Ireland was significantly stronger ($p=0.002$) among those who identify as British or Northern Irish, however, 80 percent of adults and 70 percent of 16-year olds who feel Irish also expressed a definite or probable sense of belonging to Northern Ireland. This would suggest that whilst the connection between Britishness and Northern Ireland remains much stronger, Irishness and Northern Irishness are not mutually exclusive identifications.

More striking, however is the much weaker sense of belonging to Northern Ireland among 16-year olds (Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

Markers and symbols of national and cultural identity

The months-long protests and unrest by Loyalist communities that followed Belfast City Council's decision in December 2012 to fly the Union flag over the Belfast City Hall on 18 designated days, rather than every day, was a stark reminder that the importance of flags, murals and kerbstone paintings as markers of national and religious identity in Northern Ireland. Kelly (2014) showed that following the 2012 flag protests, there was a significant increase in the perception among both Catholic and Protestant NILT respondents that there were more murals and flags on display than five years previously.

Having said that, whilst the flag protests in 2012 mobilised significant numbers of Loyalist protesters, our surveys reveal that the level of intimidation experienced by respondents through republican or loyalist cultural markers of identity has significantly decreased over time, as shown in Table 2. The level of intimidation expressed was higher among 16-year olds than adults, perhaps because young people tend to be less self-assured, but also because they are more visible and thus self-conscious, for example, when they wear school uniforms or sports tops that identify them as a member of the Catholic or Protestant community. In 2015, around one third (35%) of Catholic YLT respondents said they felt intimidated by Loyalist murals, kerb paintings or flags, whilst one in five (19%) 16-year old Protestants said they had felt intimidated by Republican murals, kerb paintings or flags. However these figures were much higher in 2003 (54% and 35% respectively) when YLT data was collected for the first time, as Table 2 shows.

Insert Table 2 about here

In general, the 2013 YLT and NILT survey show that around half of 16-year olds (49%) and four in ten adults (42%) adults supported flying of flags on lampposts throughout

Northern Ireland on special dates for particular celebrations. Support for this was much larger among Protestant 16-year olds (65%) and adults (53%) than Catholic 16-year olds (38%) and adults (32%). Less than one quarter of 16-year olds (23%) but half of adults (49%) said they wanted all the flags removed from lampposts straight away, even if this caused trouble. Catholics were much more likely than Protestants to answer that way (YLT: 35% and 10% respectively; NILT 57% and 40% respectively).

Shared spaces

The concept of ‘shared space’ remains an important element of community/good relations policies and strategies. However, understandings of what shared space should/could entail are complex. At one level, shared space may be understood as neutral space devoid of markers of identity, while, at another level, it may be seen as space where people can actively engage with each other and recognise and respect difference. The idea of shared space is thus tied to dismantling territorial, emotional and symbolic barriers. However, experiences and perceptions of a particular space as, for example, neutral/shared/safe/unsafe are not static as social and political forces can impact on perceptions; thus the discourses and policies of sharing need not necessarily be matched by attitudinal change.

Insert Table 3 about here

Table 3 shows that the majority of adults and young people regard many public places in their neighbourhoods as definitely shared and open. The only notable difference between adults and 16-year olds is that 91 percent of adults, but only 84 percent of young people regard local parks as definitely or probably shared and open spaces.

Protestant 16-year olds were generally more likely than their Catholic counterparts to say that these places in their neighbourhoods were definitely shared and open, and these

differences were statistically significant for parks, leisure centres and libraries. Further analysis shows that Catholic 16-year olds who live in mainly Catholic residential areas are least likely to say that public places are definitely shared and open in their neighbourhoods. For example, 56 percent of Catholic respondents who live in mainly Catholic neighbourhoods said that parks in their neighbourhood were definitely shared and open compared to 69 percent of Catholics who lived in mainly Protestant areas. For leisure centres these figures were 61 percent and 75 percent respectively. This suggests that differences in perceptions among young Catholics and Protestants are due to Catholics living in single identity areas feeling that the facilities, especially parks and leisure centres, are probably not shared with Protestants. Nolan (2013, p. 119) reported an increasing self-desegregation in residential areas, but said that this was almost exclusively self-desegregation in one direction, namely an increasing proportion of Catholics living in predominantly Protestant residential areas. The YLT data suggests that these Catholics experience the facilities in these areas as largely shared.

Sharing facilities and spaces, and higher levels of contact and mixing are crucial factors for improved community relations. A previous analysis of YLT data (Schubotz & Robinson, 2006) showed that integrated education and participation in cross-community projects are indeed related to more positive attitudes to community relations and a more favourable disposition towards further mixing. Since then Shared Education has been initiated and the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) was passed in 2016. OFMDFM/The Executive Office has also committed significant financial resources to the Together: Building a United Community Initiative (T:BUC), which includes resources for cross-community summer schemes.

Since 2003, the proportion of 16-year olds who have no friends from the other religious community has decreased by about two thirds from 33 percent to 12 percent, and the

proportion who never socialise with someone from the other religious community has almost halved (19% and 11%). Furthermore, whilst in 2003 around half of YLT respondents said all of their friends had the same ethnic background as themselves, this figure was just one quarter in 2015. But how does increased contact relate to attitudes?

Preferences for mixing and integration

Monitoring preferences for mixed religion environments is another important aspect of ARK's time series research. There is an ongoing debate academically, but also among policy makers and the public, whether mixed religion environments are conducive to a society coming out of conflict or whether there is room for single-identity environments, and if so, what impact these have on relationships (McGlynn, Zembylas, Bekerman, & Gallagher, 2009; Niens, Cairns, & Hewstone, 2003; Power, 2011). Economically a duplication of public services and spaces is unsustainable, so it is important to make sure that public spaces, such as schools, parks, leisure centres and libraries are run and experienced as shared spaces that people from different backgrounds feel happy and safe using.

Figure 6 shows the proportion of adults and young people who think that neighbourhoods, workplaces and schools should be mixed-religion environments. Generally, the Figure shows that opinions in relation to religious mixing are remarkably stable. We can see that across all three domains, 16-year olds tend to be slightly less in favour of religious mixing than adults. However, we can also see that whilst adults' views have hardly changed over time, 16-year olds in 2015 were slightly more favourable towards religious mixing in neighbourhoods and schools (62% and 54% expressing this preference) than their counterparts in 2003 (53% and 48% respectively). In fact, in relation to schools, in 2015, YLT respondents were for the first time just as favourably disposed to religious mixing

as adults, whilst in the other two domains adults remain more in favour of mixing than 16-year olds although the gap in attitudes has been narrowing.

Insert Figure 6 about here

However, the main message from the data is that in relation to schooling and neighbourhoods, a much larger proportions of adults and young people prefer religiously mixed settings than experience these in their lives. Over nine in ten respondents continue to live largely segregated neighbourhoods and attend largely segregated schools whilst seven in ten adults and six in ten 16-year olds would prefer religiously mixed neighbourhoods, and over half of adults and 16-year olds prefer mixed religion schools.

Conclusions

Recent discussions about attitudes to community relations and sharing have increasingly raised concerns about the views of young people. Although some young people are strongly of the opinion that it is the older generations' responsibility and duty to adopt and pass on less sectarian messages, which apparently are alien to the younger generation and their ambitions, the Life and Times data had consistently shown that it is 16-year olds who harbour more negative views. The reasons for this are undoubtedly complex and nuanced, and while difficult to unpick fully in a survey potential explanations have been offered. One reason is that young people growing up in post-conflict Northern Ireland have a different baseline from which they assess community relations. Although elements of the conflict, including a level of paramilitary control, still exist, in particular in those working class areas which have been affected most by sectarian violence, most 16-year olds have grown up without experiencing sustained violence and sectarian conflict. Nonetheless, the structural, emotional and physical challenges faced by some young, particularly those from socio-economic disadvantaged communities remain stark.

Perhaps it is understandable, therefore, that adults are more sensitive to positive change in community relations than young people. However, the gap between the views of adults and young people has been decreasing which, perhaps, indicates that a reasonably stable peace process is increasingly being experienced similarly by adults and young people.

The majority of both adults and young people express positive attitudes towards mixing and integration, and again the gap in attitudes between adults and young people appears to be closing slowly over time. With a further stabilisation of the Peace Process, it can be expected that the changes in attitudes will be more difficult to measure as, predictably, an increasing proportion of respondents among adults and young people will say that relations are about the same. Perhaps, it is therefore more useful to monitor the proportion of people who think relations are getting worse, as this could be the best indicator for assessing increasing or decreasing dissatisfaction.

The data presented in the second part of this article show very clearly that there is very little evidence to suggest that efforts to continue with programmes that encourage formal mixing or integration should be compromised. While acknowledging the difficulties of promoting more positive relationships between and perceptions of ‘the other community’ (see Cummings et al 2011), and that greater contact between groups will not automatically produce more positive attitudes, nonetheless the survey results indicate that increased contact is related to more positive attitudes. This is particularly the case for young Protestants, and, perhaps, this increasing level of contact and integration has contributed to the more positive views about community relations that young Protestants hold now compared to when data collection started in 2003. There is an increase in the number of Catholics who now live in what used to be traditionally Protestant residential areas. Our data show that they largely experience spaces as shared in these neighbourhoods. The flip-side of the demographic shift in Northern Ireland is that increasingly it is Catholics

who experience segregated living and segregated schooling. The number of Catholics attending *de-facto* Protestant state-controlled schools has increased over the last two decades, whereas, with a few exceptions, the majority of Catholic Maintained schools are still attended almost exclusively by Catholic pupils. This highlights the importance of integrated and shared education initiatives, as for many Catholic young people who live in predominantly Catholic areas and attend Catholic schools, these initiatives provide valuable opportunities to mix and form friendships with their counterparts from Protestant, other or no religious backgrounds.

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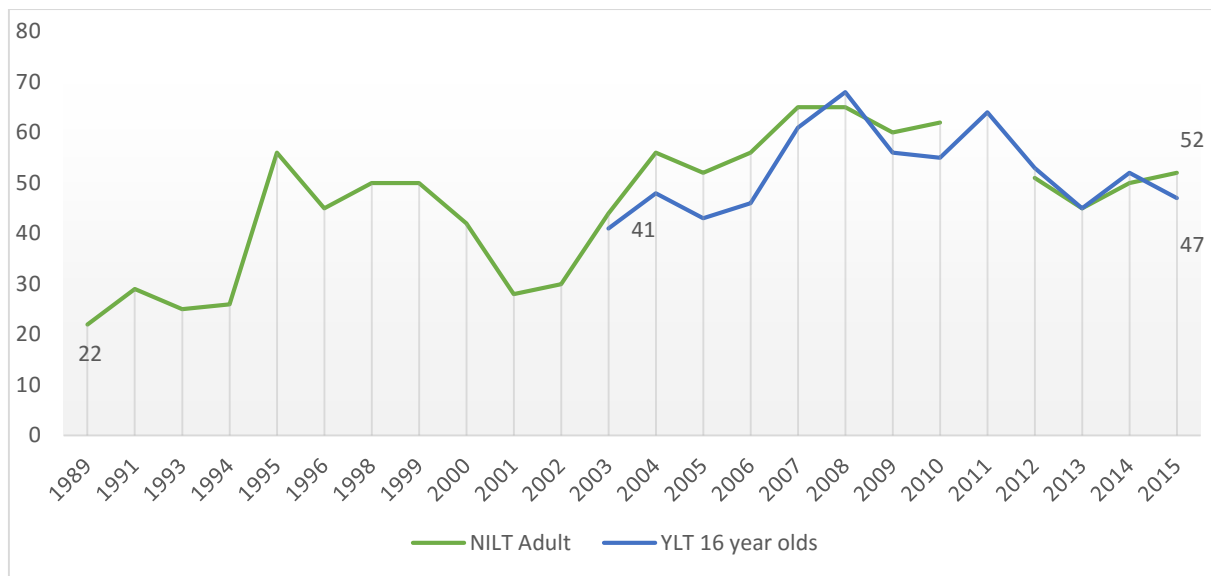
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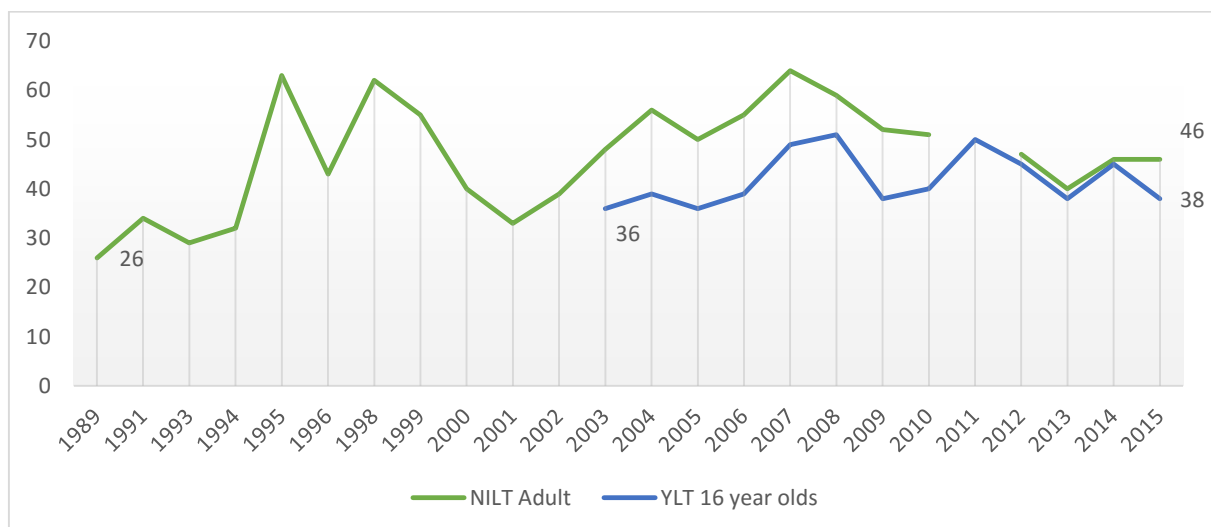
Figure: 1 Proportions of adults (NISA, NILT) and 16-year olds (YLT) believing that relations between Protestants and Catholics are better now than 5 years ago (%)



Sources: NISA (1989-2000); NILT (2001-2015); YLT (2003-2015)

Note on missing data: In 2011 NILT was not conducted due to lack of funding.

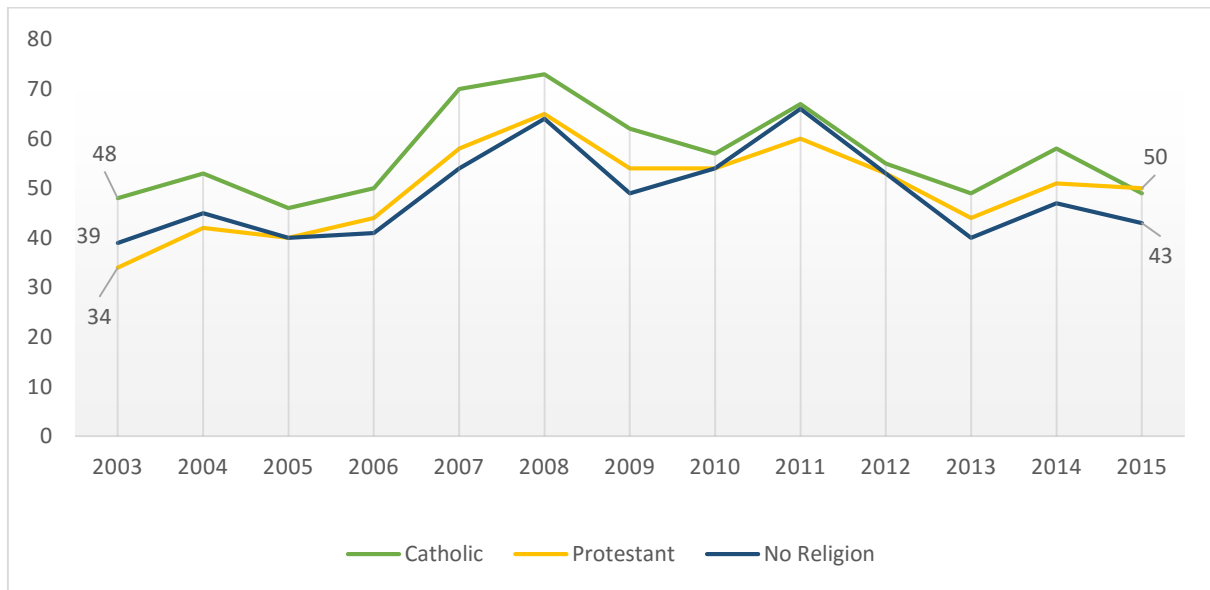
Figure 2: Proportions of adults (NISA, NILT) and 16-year olds (YLT) believing that relations between Protestants and Catholics will be BETTER in 5 years' time (%)



Sources: NISAS (1989-2000); NILT (2001-2015); YLT (2003-2015)

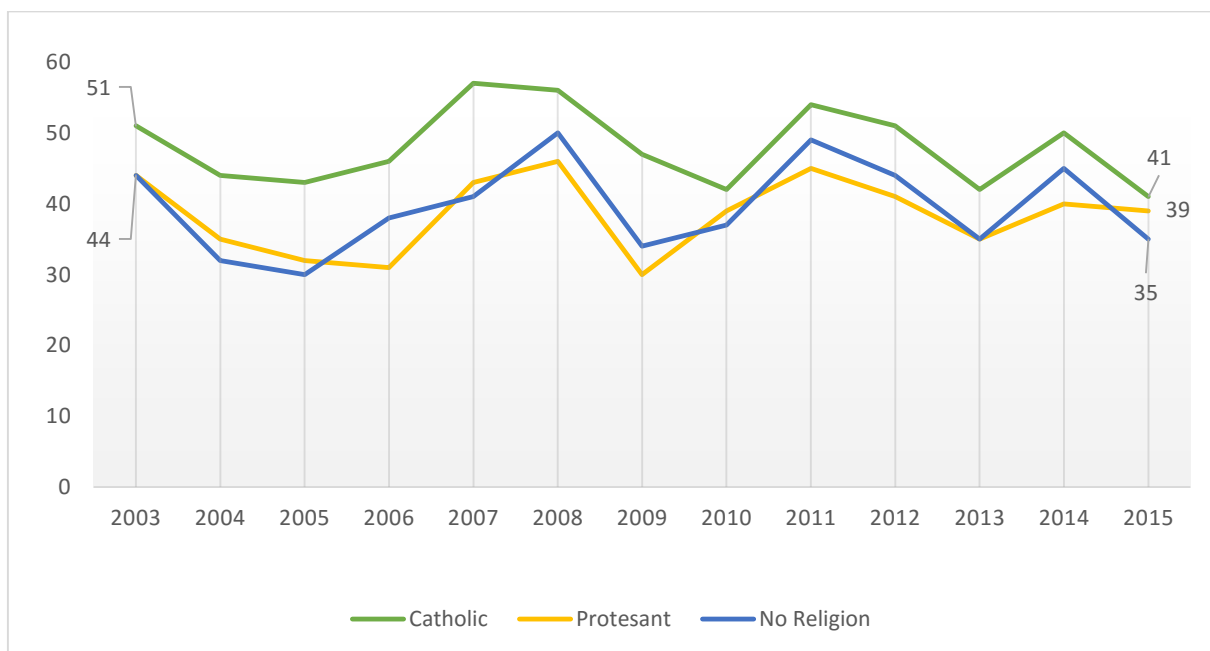
Note on missing data: In 2011 NILT was not conducted due to lack of funding

Figure 3: YLT respondents saying relations between Protestants and Catholics are BETTER now than five years ago by religious background (%)



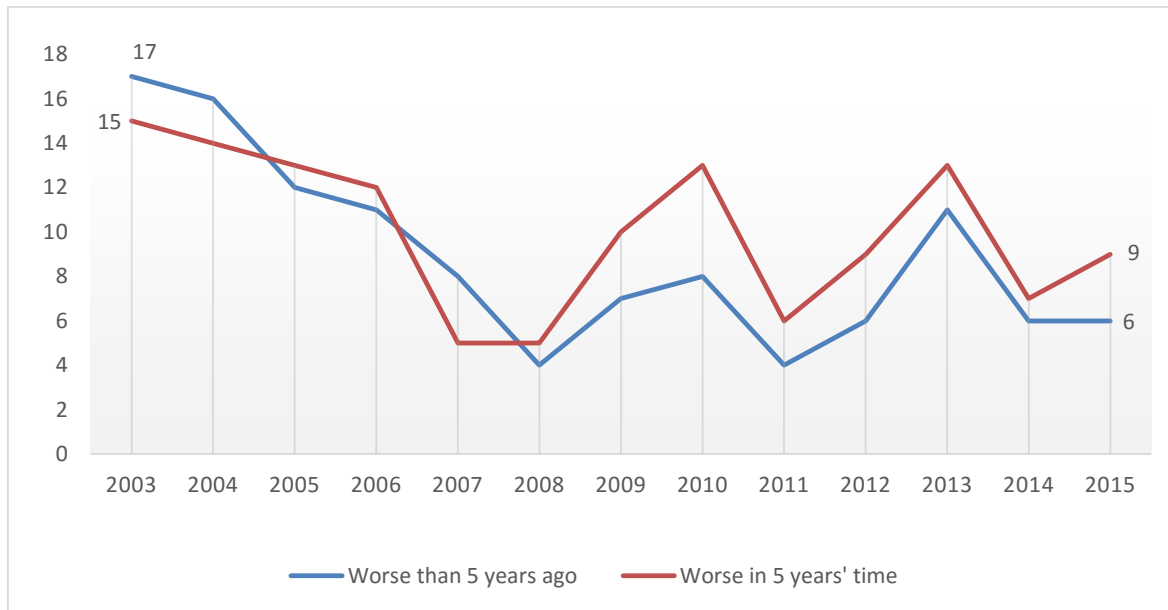
Source: YLT (2003-2015)

Figure 4: YLT respondents saying that relationships between Protestants and Catholics will be BETTER in five years' times. By religious background (%)



Source: YLT (2003-2015)

Figure 5: YLT respondents saying that relationships between Protestants and Catholics are WORSE now or will be WORSE in five years' times (%)



Source: YLT (2003-2015)

Table 1: Respondents' sense of belonging to Northern Ireland by their national identity

	%					
	NILT			YLT		
	British	Irish	Northern Irish	British	Irish	Northern Irish
Definitely	56	39	57	35	22	32
Probably	29	41	31	47	48	48
Probably not	9	10	7	9	14	10
Definitely not	5	7	4	3	7	3
Don't know	1	3	1	7	9	7

Sources: 2015 NILT and YLT surveys

Table 2: Proportion of NILT and YLT respondents who felt intimidated by...

	%							
	NILT Catholics		NILT Protestants		YLT Catholics		YLT Protestants	
	2003	2015	2003	2015	2003	2015	2003	2015
...Republican murals, kerb paintings or flags	12	6	29	10	14	5	35	19
...Loyalist murals kerb paintings or flags	23	19	19	12	54	35	15	8

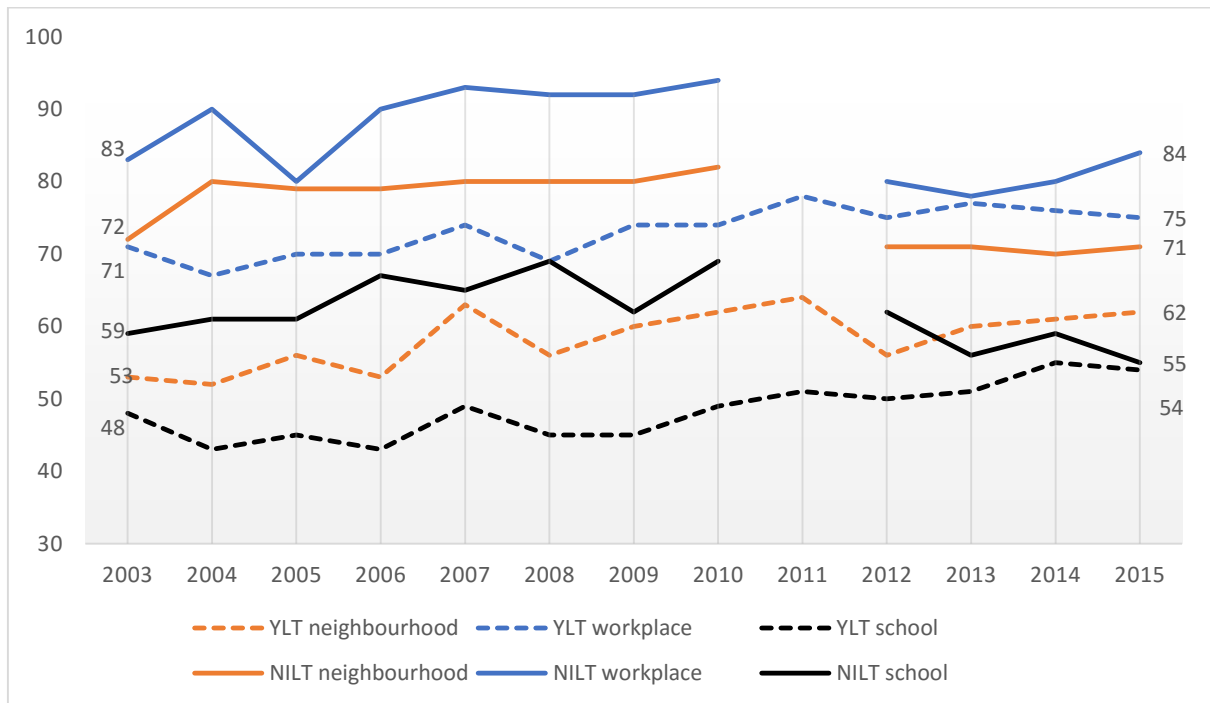
Sources: 2003 and 2015 NILT and YLT surveys

Table 3: Proportion of respondents who regard the following spaces as shared and open between Catholics and Protestants

	%			
	NILT		YLT	
	Definitely	Probably	Definitely	Probably
Leisure Centres	69	20	70	20
Parks	69	22	61	23
Libraries	73	20	70	20
Shops	76	19	71	23

Sources: 2015 NILT and YLT surveys

Figure 6: Proportion of adults and 16-year olds who express a preference for mixed-religious environments



Sources: NILT (2003-2015); YLT (2003-2015)

Note: In 2011 NILT was not conducted due to lack of funding